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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000431

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: SUPPORT COUNCILS IN SUNNI REGIONS: FAILURE TO  
LAUNCH

REF: A. 09 BAGHDAD 124

[1](#)B. 08 BAGHDAD 3808

[1](#)C. 08 BAGHDAD 3772

[1](#)D. 08 BAGHDAD 3744

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor John Fox for reasons 1.4 (b)  
and (d).

This is the third in a series of messages examining Support  
Councils, their impact on Iraqi politics and security, and  
implications for USG policy.

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Support Councils (SC) (Arabic: Majlis Al  
Isnad), have not had as great an effect in the central  
Sunni-Arab majority provinces as in southern, Shi'a-dominated  
provinces (refs). Sunni suspicions of the Maliki Government  
of Iraq (GOI), already established tribal groupings and other  
entities such as the Sahwa/Sons of Iraq (SOI), and improving  
security in the Sunni provinces have limited the influence of  
SCs in Anbar, Salah Ad Din (SaD), and Diyala provinces. Only  
Diyala has had much current experience with SCs. Observers  
of these provinces predict that SCs in the Sunni Arab belt  
will fade away. To survive and maintain relevance, SCs will  
have to find a role in the more complex, uncertain, and  
competitive political environment resulting from January's  
provincial elections and the entry into force of the  
Provincial Powers Law. END SUMMARY.

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STRONG WITH THE SHI'A, A MIXED BAG WITH THE SUNNI  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) The Support Council concept is not new, but the  
GOI, under the auspices of the Implementation and Follow-Up  
Committee on National Reconciliation (IFCNR), formed the  
current SCs in the south-central provinces, Baghdad, and  
Diyala in the spring of 2008 (ref A). Their intent was to  
find a mechanism through which tribal leaders could advise  
and assist provincial governments on policy matters, and the  
Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) on security matters. IFCNR,  
which responds directly to the Prime Minister's Office, gave  
each SC a start-up payment and a monthly stipend thereafter  
(ref A).

[1](#)3. (C) A lack of clarity on both SC roles in provincial  
security matters and SCs' relationship to provincial  
governments initially aroused concerns that they would become  
a patronage network for PM Maliki. However, SCs have had  
some success in the south in provinces with limited security  
and reconciliation needs (ref A). IFCNR initially intended  
to expand SCs into majority-Sunni Arab provinces, but this  
effort has delivered mixed results.

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A FALSE START IN ANBAR  
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[1](#)4. (SBU) In October 2008, Deputy Prime Minister Rafie Al  
Issawi announced the establishment of a Support Council in  
Anbar's Fallujah district. Its goal was to transform Anbar's

SOI program into a government-mandated Iraqi Security Force (ISF) unit. As with SCs in the southern Shi'a provinces, IFCNR was responsible for setting up the SC, which was to report directly to PM Maliki.

15. (C) By the end of 2008 however, the new SC was no longer being mentioned in connection with SOI and now, despite some scattered activists in the Fallujah area, seems to be moribund. A demonstration supporting the formation of SCs in Anbar in late November made the Iraqi news, but failed to resuscitate the program. Suspicions of the Shi'a-led Maliki GOI, a belief that SCs might conflict with existing tribal and security councils in Anbar, and the inability to find a strong leader who could lead a potentially controversial group such as the SC might have contributed to its stalling there. The pre-eminence of Sahwa leader Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha in Anbar also likely played a role. Abu Risha was approached about joining and leading the SC, but refused. Approached about joining and leading the SC, but refused since its remit was nominally apolitical. Moreover, if Abu Risha had allied himself and the Sahwa with SCs, he would not have been able to open Sahwa offices outside Anbar, limiting his political ambitions.

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LACK OF ROLE IN SAD  
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16. (C) In Salah Ad Din, IFCNR had established an earlier model of SC in 2007 in order to oversee cooperation between the SaD SOI and Coalition Forces (CF). The provincial government seems to have used the group as a way of strengthening ties to the Prime Minister, by organizing

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itself along sub-district and district, rather than tribal, lines. The SaD Deputy Governor sent a strong signal of centralization when he emphasized to the SCs that they were subordinate to the Iraqi Security Forces. But these earlier SCs were unable to find a role in SaD owing to the close relationship between the SOI and CF. As in Anbar, suspicion of the Shi'a-led Maliki GOI, as well as already-established tribal advisory councils, also militated against the development of SCs. Some in SaD have called for their renewed development, viewing them as a conduit for GOI money and political influence.

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A CONVOLUTED HISTORY IN DIYALA  
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17. (C) In Diyala, after an abortive attempt to set up SCs there in late 2007, IFCNR staff were dispatched to the provincial capital, Ba'aquba, in May 2008 and set up 14 Support Councils. The Diyala SCs feature cross-sectarian membership, and are not solely tribal, having many urban professionals in their ranks. Their primary aims have been to gather intelligence for security, support reconciliation efforts, and advise the GOI on government services. The ineffectiveness of the Diyala provincial government made Diyala particularly fertile ground for the establishment of SCs. And indeed, the IFCNR presence in Diyala, through the Support Councils, did get certain stalled reconstruction projects moving.

18. (SBU) Opinions on the SCs' effectiveness in Diyala appear to vary according to sectarian background. Members of the Khalis district council (who are Shi'a) think SCs serve their community well--mainly dealing with reconciliation, assisting Internally Displaced People, and identifying terrorists. On the other hand, in Khan Bani Sad, a Sunni Arab enclave in southwestern Diyala, leaders told ePRT members that the local SC had become intelligence-gatherers for a corrupt (Shi'a controlled) IP force bent on targeting SOI and other Sunni leaders.

¶9. (SBU) Bureaucratic overlap has also limited the effectiveness of Diyala's SCs. The Ministry of Interior's Department of Tribal Affairs (DoTA) has an office in Diyala and often works on issues similar to those the SCs are meant to address. SCs and the DoTA often worked independently of one other.

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THE FUTURE OF SCS IN SUNNI ARAB PROVINCES  
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¶10. (C) Overall, SCs in the Sunni-dominated provinces seem to have a poor future. PRT Diyala believes that Support Councils in the province will fade away as tribal sheikhs re-establish their own councils and as local government becomes more effective. Likewise, PRT Anbar maintains that, if the GOI insists on establishing SCs in Anbar, they will be resisted by tribal elements there. And thus far, there have been only preliminary talks to establish them in Kirkuk (refs B, C).

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COMMENT  
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¶11. (C) So far, Support Councils have not found a real place in the central Sunni-Arab provinces. New and more complex political forces will pose a greater challenge to SCs, as Iraq enters a formative phase of provincial-central government relations. The seating of new provincial councils, with new powers bestowed by the Provincial Powers Law, will change the relationship between the provinces and the GOI. To stay relevant, Support Councils will have to find an equilibrium, province-by-province, among the competing forces of central and provincial powers, the legal framework, and traditional, local ways of governing. Otherwise, the central government may have to seek new ways of making its influence felt more keenly in Sunni-dominated provinces. END COMMENT.  
BUTENIS